

Looking after our staff and supporting their health and wellbeing

This briefing provides an overview of the importance of promoting health and wellbeing of staff and providing services to support their health and wellbeing both in terms of their own individual wellbeing and improving attendance rates within the NHS in Wales.

Key Points

- The NHS is the biggest employer in Wales, providing a significant contribution to both the national and local economy. The next five years will be a critical period of transformation in health and care services in Wales. As highlighted in the A Healthier Wales a sea-change in the way services are designed and delivered is vital. The workforce is key to both driving change and putting the NHS in Wales on a sustainable footing.
- A Healthier Wales stated that “our staff, their skills, experience and values, are fundamental to a successful NHS and social care system” adding that there needs to be a renewed emphasis on supporting the health and wellbeing of the workforce. This aspect was highlighted in the Parliamentary Review where it was recognised that “a key factor in delivering high quality health and social care is the wellbeing and engagement of staff”, with the recommendation being that this should be given focus through the quadruple aim which has an expressed dimension which notes that we need “to enrich the wellbeing, capability and engagement of the health and social care workforce”.
- In taking this forward, *A Healthier Wales* set out an action to “*make NHS Wales an exemplar employer in its support for wellbeing at work and a healthy workforce, building on work that is already underway in the NHS. We want to see the NHS leading change in this area across health and social care, and into other sectors, by sharing good practice, guidance, and online promotion and evaluation tools.*”
- Health Boards and Trusts have been working in partnership with Trade Unions to develop a new approach to the health and wellbeing and this paper sets out how renewed foundations have been put in place to support NHS Wales becoming an exemplar employer in its support for wellbeing at work and to develop a healthy workforce.

Overview

The workforce is the backbone of the NHS with NHS Wales employing around 90,000 individual members (80,000 FTEs) of staff with an annual pay bill for 2017/18 of £3.6 billion.

As well as recruiting and training new staff, it is critically important to focus on our current workforce and their ongoing development needs. The most cost-effective way to ensure NHS Wales has the staff we need in the future is to support and retain the people we already employ and keep them fit and healthy. More than 50% of today's workforce will still be working in the health service in 2032 and if we want to transform services over this period we need to support and develop our current workforce through a focus on the quadruple aim dimension of developing "a motivated and sustainable health and social care workforce".

In taking this forward we have developed a range of health and wellbeing toolkits and resources to ensure that there is support for the current workforce.

Health and wellbeing

Without staff that are well and at work the NHS can't deliver quality and effective care to patients. We need to ensure that staff are provided with an environment and opportunities that encourage and enable them to lead healthy lives and make choices that support their wellbeing.

NHS Wales has developed a staff health and wellbeing charter "[Caring for people who care](#)". It aims to support and engage staff in delivering excellent care and acknowledges the importance of a healthy and valued workforce. The charter emphasises that to promote a culture of care for patients, carers and the public, there must also be a culture of care for all staff. The charter sets out the framework by which NHS Wales' organisations are committed to encouraging the health and wellbeing of staff and recognises that staff act as role models to the community they work in, promoting and preventing ill health.

The charter highlights that it is the joint responsibility of managers and individual employees to work together to encourage healthier lifestyles and life choices, support each other in the work place, and promote the effective management of sickness when staff are cannot work through ill health or are at risk of having to take sick leave.

The results of this year's staff survey show that the ongoing work and developments in the areas of employee health and wellbeing is having a positive impact. Scores for the majority of questions have improved and the overall engagement score has increased from 3.65 to 3.82. Positively, the percentage of positive responses to the question "My organisation is committed to helping staff balance their work and home life" increased to 48% from 43% in 2016 and 32% in 2013.

Managing attendance – A new approach

Working in collaboration with Trade Unions, NHS Wales launched a range of new health and wellbeing products to support employees and managers. These signpost staff to information and resources that enable them to make choices with regards to their own health and wellbeing and that of others:

- [Our Wellbeing Matters](#)
- [Manager Wellbeing](#)

To further our new approaches to Health and Wellbeing it was felt that the existing procedures around the management of sickness absence needed to be re-orientated towards supporting attendance at work and maintaining health and wellbeing rather than addressing absence. In taking this forward it is recognised that sustaining health and wellbeing is a shared responsibility between the employee and the organisation and the new NHS Wales Managing Attendance at Work Policy sets out the key responsibilities of managers, employees and trade unions in supporting attendance.

Manager responsibilities include:

- The primary responsibility for the management of attendance. The rationale for this approach is that our managers should “know their employees” and be familiar with the issues surrounding the attendance profile and needs of their employees.
- Ensuring that employees are aware of the range of health and wellbeing support that is available to them in and out of the workplace.
- Consideration of the opportunities to return employees to work safely and at the earliest opportunity through the supportive mechanisms such as Phased Return and Temporary Redeployment / and Reasonable / Tailored Adjustments.
- Responsibility for creating an environment, which is conducive to health and wellbeing, and in which a low sickness absence record and regular attendance at work is expected.

Employee responsibilities include:

- A responsibility for their own health and wellbeing.
- Taking up all reasonable opportunities to maximise and protect their own health and wellbeing.
- Seeking medical advice and treatment as soon as possible to support their own health and wellbeing.
- A responsibility to attend Occupational Health appointments and sickness absence meetings when requested to do so.
- Self-referral to available services where they exist, i.e. Occupational Health, Physiotherapy, Employee Wellbeing, where this would be beneficial to their own health and wellbeing.

- A responsibility for keeping in touch regularly with their manager when unwell and to maximise attendance at work in line with their own contract of employment.
- Employees also have a duty to care for and support colleagues in doing the jobs they have agreed to do.

Role of Trade Union representatives include:

- Support for individual members and their organisation in minimising absence from work caused by sickness.
- Providing their members with advice on all aspects of the policy.
- Ensuring an appropriate trade union representative is available at all levels of the procedure should their member wish to be accompanied and to ensure that meetings can occur in a timely manner.
- Working closely with managers and other groups to make the policy effective at organisational level, including being aware of all relevant legislation.
- Working with their individual member, the manager and Occupational Health to facilitate a return to work as soon as possible following a period of sickness.

This new approach aims to support the health and wellbeing of employees in the workplace; support employees to return to work following a period of sickness absence, safely and as quickly as possible; and to support employees to sustain their attendance at work.

Health and wellbeing incorporates several factors, which include physical, psychological, social, economic and environmental. If any of these are out of balance, then this can have a negative impact on wellbeing.

Physical wellbeing

A state of physical wellbeing is not just the absence of disease. It includes lifestyle behaviour choices to ensure health, avoid preventable diseases and conditions, and to live in a balanced state of body, mind, and spirit. Promoting good physical health and wellbeing among employees can reduce their levels of sickness, increase energy levels and boost levels of concentration.

Managers should encourage their employees to undertake physical activity, take rest breaks, eat meals regularly, keep hydrated throughout the shift, and have opportunities to de-stress through talking to peers.

Mental and psychological wellbeing

In NHS Wales 27% of sickness absence is attributable to stress, anxiety and psychological conditions. Managers need to be aware of the following key aspects of the work environment, to reduce workplace stressors where possible and ensure that appropriate supports are in place:

- The quality of and fairness of workplace relationships;
- The implementation of organisational policies known to support health and wellbeing;
- The way in which jobs are designed and work allocated;
- The quality and health of the team and how it functions;
- The quality and availability of social support;
- The availability of information about the psychosocial demands within the workplace, including the range of common stressors;
- Follow recommendations on how to support employees following unusually challenging experiences and incidents;

- Supporting employees who experience stress resulting from employee relations processes i.e. disciplinary, capability, grievance, suspension; and
- Access to specialist support such as those offered by Workforce & Organisational Development, the Employee Wellbeing Service and Occupational Health.

Environmental and social wellbeing

It is recognised that there may be times when employees require additional support in the work place to maintain a safe working environment.

Employees may also require additional support in the form of time away from the workplace to respond to other pressures e.g. those arising from caring responsibilities where a few hours absence may be required whilst an issue is resolved.

A 'Borrowing Leave' protocol is being developed, as an additional approach to support employees in where they are unable to utilise other arrangements such as annual leave, purchase additional annual leave, special leave, flexible working etc.

Financial wellbeing

NHS Wales understands the importance of how financial concerns can affect employee mental and physical health, as well as a recognition that, as income providers, we play a vital role in our employee's financial lives. Stress caused by debt, pay levels, or lack of financial awareness can have a detrimental impact on employee performance and potentially increase absenteeism.

How to procedures

In supporting the delivery of the Managing Attendance At Work policy, seven “How to” procedures have been developed and these cover the areas of:

- Notification and Certification of Sickness Absence;
- Managing Frequent Short-Term Sickness Absence;
- Managing Long Term Sickness Absence;
- Occupational Health;
- Return to Work;
- Phased Return and Temporary Redeployment; and
- Reasonable / Tailored Adjustments.

Faster access to services for NHS staff

An approach to rapid access to mental health and musculo-skeletal services is being taken forward within Health Boards and Trusts. This is in the form of guidance for organisations to consider and determine how they should utilise this within their environments and contexts. The [guidance](#) notes that it is:

“...Intended to support HR and occupational health (OH) professionals and boards making decisions about how to manage rapid access services for staff in their organisation. It provides good practice examples and emphasises the importance of:

- **Timely intervention** (easy and early treatment for the main causes of sickness absence in the NHS); and
- **Rehabilitation** - to help staff stay in work during illness or return to work after illness.”

Menopause

A new All Wales Menopause policy is about to be launched.

NHS Wales recognises that staff may need additional consideration, support and adjustments during this transitional time before, during and after the menopause and ensure that staff are treated according to their circumstances and needs. To ensure that individuals feel confident in discussing menopausal symptoms in asking for support and adjustments in order to continue with their role within the organisation.

The aim is to raise awareness among managers of their responsibility to understand the menopause and related issues and how they can affect staff, their partners, families and work colleagues by educating & informing managers about potential symptoms and how they can support individuals in the workplace; raise wider awareness and understanding among employees and to outline support and reasonable adjustments that are available; and subsequently reduce menopause related sickness by supporting staff to remain in work rather than having to take sick leave (or in some cases resign) meaning that the organisation retains valuable skills and experience.



Many healthcare organisations across Wales and beyond have a number of initiatives in place to support staff. A few examples are outlined below:

Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University Health Board (ABM UHB)

ABMU Health Board's Wellbeing service has developed a self-referral Musculoskeletal Pathway for staff that enables an initial Physiotherapy telephone assessment before identifying the best course of action that may include self-management advice and support, a referral to Out Patient Physiotherapy or an expedited appointment with Diagnostic services or Surgery.

A Nurse self-referred to the service after experiencing partial paralysis in her foot after an acute flair-up of a long-standing back problem. She was assessed over the phone by the Wellbeing Physiotherapist and advised to continue with exercises that had helped in the past. A follow-up call a week later revealed that the problem had persisted, and she was referred to the Community Musculoskeletal Service (MCAS) who advised an MRI scan. A cancellation MRI was arranged through the service which she attended at short notice enabling quick diagnosis of disc protrusion but without the need for surgery. The Nurse was advised to undertake additional self-management exercises and her symptoms diminished over several weeks. With amended duties in work, she was able to remain in work throughout and supported to return to full health.

Welsh Ambulance Service NHS Trust (WAST)

A new scheme to improve the support for colleagues who have experienced a traumatic event was launched by the Welsh Ambulance Service on Monday 30th April 2018.

The Trauma Risk Management (TRiM) Programme is a peer support system designed to identify those at risk of developing psychological illness as a result of a traumatic event. TRiM is already in place at London, East Midlands, South Central, South East and South West Ambulance Services, and at more than a dozen police and fire and rescue services across the UK.

Funding from Welsh Government has enabled the Trust to train more than 30 colleagues as TRiM Practitioners, and nine of those as TRiM Managers. TRiM Practitioners have undergone training to allow them to understand the effects that traumatic events can have upon people. They're not counsellors or therapists, but are there to listen, offer practical advice and signpost to specialist support.

Being witness to a traumatic event can have profound and long lasting effects on our staff, their families and the organisation. The nature of ambulance work means that there will be occasions where colleagues are exposed to traumatic incidents, therefore, the Trust has a responsibility to look after the psychological welfare of our staff. Whilst TriM is not a solution to all issues involving mental health, it is an additional intervention to support colleagues.

TRiM is used 48-72 hours after a distressing incident, and participation is completely voluntary. Symptoms of psychological stress include having flashbacks of the event, being easily startled and feeling numb or losing interest in the things you used to care about.

Nicola Bowen, the Trust's Health, Wellbeing and Engagement Lead said: "The introduction of TRiM is just one of a number of initiatives we have in the pipeline to broaden and improve the support available to our staff and volunteers, all as part of the Trust's Mental Health Improvement Plan".

Velindre University NHS Trust

Velindre University NHS Trust are introducing a range of initiatives and schemes in this financial year to support the Trust in achieving its objectives as set out in its health and wellbeing programme of work.

- **Relaunch the Complementary Therapy Support Scheme for employees.** Employees who meet the agreed criteria will be eligible to receive up to a maximum of 4 therapy sessions per year. These sessions will be funded by the Trust to support and improve their health and wellbeing;
- **Provide Mental Health First Aid training to managers.** This will raise their awareness of and teach new skills in respect of mental health management and support e.g. recognising the signs and symptom, how to respond to mental health crisis and how to engage and signpost employees to appropriate and available resources and professional services;
- **Train employees to become in-house trained and accredited mediators.** It is well-documented that timely and successful mediation can assist individuals to rebuild relationships and help to create a less stressful and more productive working environment for those involved in workplace disputes.
- **Provide Resolution Skills training for managers.** This would enable managers to gain a good understanding of how mediation works and how to put the skills into practice, in day to day management or in a conflict resolution context. It could prevent situations escalating into formal complaints, grievances etc.
- **Financial Wellbeing Services.** Work is underway in partnership to procure financial wellbeing services responding to evidence of the stress that financial management issues puts on up to half of NHS staff.

'Fit in 50', Luton and Dunstable University Hospital, England

Luton and Dunstable University Hospital have adopted a new initiative, 'Fit in 50', to improve the health and wellbeing of their employees. The University Hospital recognised that many individuals in the organisation were sat at a desk for the majority of their working day. They are focused on their work and tend to forget to get up and stretch their limbs, which has a detrimental effect on their health and wellbeing. The effects of a sedentary lifestyle and its negative influence on office-based workers are well-documented. Sitting for long periods has been associated with many health-related conditions and has a significant impact on employee sickness absence within the NHS.

The Fit in 50 initiative is a booklet that aims to improve the health and wellbeing of sedentary / office-based workers. The booklet encourages NHS employees to undertake just 50 seconds of exercise per hour by doing stretches, walking etc. These exercises can be easily incorporated into a working day and promote independent exercise. It is produced in a booklet format to give the reader the opportunity to refocus employees' attention away from their computers at least once every hour.

The Fit in 50 booklets and posters have provided the perfect opportunity to remind staff of the importance of staying active at the workplace. So far, the therapies administration team, breast screening team and the risk governance and legal team have been particularly engaged with the exercises. Staff have also reported that the exercises are fun and get the whole team involved. The exercises are a really effective way of keeping the teams active, while simultaneously improving team bonding.

Psychological First Aiders, Main Line Health, Pennsylvania, USA

Work-related stress and burnout can have serious implications for an individual's physical health and wellbeing, particularly those who work on the frontline of delivering care e.g. nurses in Emergency Departments. Stress and burnout also impact an individual's productivity and patient wellbeing. Psychological first aid is a type of emotional support often used by disaster relief organisations. The goals are to reduce initial distress caused by trauma, enhance coping strategies, and actively connect individuals with ongoing support services.

Main Line Health, a five-hospital health system headquartered in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, has implemented psychological first aid to help support staff in the immediate hours following trauma. Managers have recruited clinical and non-clinical staff to serve in psychological first aid teams. To qualify, staff must be skilled communicators and complete an in-house training course as well as a four-hour refresher course at least once per year. At Main Line Health, psychological first aid responders provide one-on-one or group support to colleagues struggling with trauma, emotional distress, anxiety or any other form of work-related stress. Psychological first aiders can request that additional resource be allocated to the frontline to cover for the temporary staff shortage, if necessary. Main Line Health also requires that psychological first aiders connect frontline staff directly to the organisation's Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) following support. The EAP connects staff members to appropriate services, such as formal incident debriefing or counselling, should they be required.

Qualitative feedback at Main Line Health has shown that the initiative has had a range of positive impacts. The data shows increased manager awareness of the emotional wellbeing of employees; increased EAP utilisation by staff and first responders; and a more accessible mechanism for providing immediate support to staff who need it.

Conclusion

NHS Wales is committed to ensuring that all individuals are treated fairly and with dignity and respect in their working environment. It is also committed to ensuring the health, safety and wellbeing of the workforce.

As well as benefiting individual staff, our health and wellbeing initiatives will also have an impact on sickness absence rates and consequently a positive impact on patient care and safety. We hope that through our combined approaches to health and wellbeing these will deliver a significant improvement in attendance across NHS Wales.

The priority over the next few months will be to implement the new approach to managing attendance across the service. A new training package to support implementation has been developed in partnership with Trade Unions and will be launched in November 2018.

How can the Welsh NHS Confederation help you?

Please get in touch if you want further details on any of the issues raised in this briefing. Please contact **Nesta Lloyd-Jones, Policy and Public Affairs Manager** at

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The Welsh NHS Confederation is the only national membership body which represents all the organisations that make up the NHS in Wales: the seven Local Health Boards, the three NHS Trusts and Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW).

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